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KATHMANDU FOR OFDA REGIONAL ADVISOR WILLIAM BERGER

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR AND UN REACH AGREEMENT WITH GSL ON
STREAMLINED PROCESS FOR RAISING HUMANITARIAN ISSUES AND
GREATER BURDENSARING

¶1. (SBU) Ambassador hosted a meeting on Thursday, March 29 with UN Resident Coordinator Frederick Lyons and Minister for Disaster Management and Human Rights Samarasinghe to brief Samarasinghe on donor concerns about the current structure of the Consultative Committee on Humanitarian Assistance (CCHA) and the importance of burdensharing by the Government of Sri Lanka. With respect to the CCHA the Ambassador expressed appreciation for the continued involvement of Samarasinghe and Secretary of Defense Rajapaksa in CCHA meetings. But he also noted that the CCHA had drifted away from its original mandate as a policy-making meeting for resolving problems to a much more operational meeting on a wide range of matters that could be handled by subordinates. Ambassador, with the concurrence of Lyons, suggested that Samarasinghe establish smaller working groups in the areas of logistics, livelihoods, internally displaced persons, health, and education. These would be co-chaired by the appropriate heads of UN agencies and the secretaries of the relevant government ministries. The CCHA could then meet to resolve any issues that could not be resolved by the working groups and address any significant policy issues.

¶2. (SBU) Samarasinghe agreed to all of the proposals and at a subsequent meeting of the CCHA later in the morning announced the formation of the five working groups and the decision to pare down the composition of the CCHA to include from the government side, Minister Samarasinghe, the Defense Secretary, and the Commissioner General for Essential

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Services. Donors agreed they would be represented by the Co-Chair representative (currently the US Ambassador), the UN Resident Coordinator, the head of the EC Humanitarian Office, the ICRC, the head of the Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies, and UNHCR.

¶3. (SBU) On the principle of burdensharing, the Ambassador told the Minister frankly that there was substantial unhappiness in the donor community that following the recent

government military actions in Thoppigala (in eastern Sri Lanka) that had left large numbers of new IDPs, the government had turned to the international community expecting them to fund all of the humanitarian relief efforts that were needed following this military operation. Donors in effect were helping to facilitate military action which in fact the donors all oppose. The donors therefore wanted to reaffirm the importance both of avoiding conflict and financial burdensharing. Lyons concurred, saying that it would be very important for the government to note in all of its communications: a) that it has primary responsibility for responding to all humanitarian emergencies; b) the steps the government is taking to respond to such emergencies; and c) where the government needs the assistance of the international community to fill any gaps. Samarasinghe understood fully and briefed CCHA participants of this decision in the meeting later that morning.

14. (SBU) COMMENT: Samarasinghe's willingness to make mid-course corrections will be welcomed by all UN agencies and international donors and will help to both streamline the humanitarian coordination process and assure the government takes appropriate responsibility as first responder to humanitarian crises, many of which are of its own making.
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